

Report Wheeling National Heritage Area

■ 1.0 Site Description

The Wheeling National Heritage Area encompasses the central portion of the City of Wheeling, West Virginia. Located at the point where the National Road crossed the Ohio River, the community has been a center for transportation and commerce for over 200 years. Neither a National Park nor a National Historic Site, the Wheeling Heritage Area is defined as the area of the City of Wheeling that focuses on the Ohio River. The area includes a diverse mixture of residential, commercial, governmental, entertainment, and industrial land uses, with many individual structures well over 100 years old.

As described in the Summary Plan for the Heritage Area:

“The Plan creates an exciting new vision for the city and the region, and proposes revitalizing the Port of Wheeling. The concept is to create an interpretive and development infrastructure which will revitalize the downtown by opening the Waterfront to serve residents, visitors, and tourists; creating a new landside gateway to the city in the area of the Suspension Bridge; and enhancing the civic area near West Virginia Independence Hall. Contextual settings in North Wheeling, Center Wheeling, and Wheeling Island will reinforce the Plan’s concept with supportive interpretation and economic development activities. This strategy is to tell the story of Wheeling and its people, and their role in the development of the state and the nation, while stimulating economic revitalization and ensuring the conservation of its resources.”

This is not yet a federally authorized heritage area that receives funding as part of the NPS’ annual budgeting process. Rather, the federal funding to date for this area has been provided by special line item appropriations.

■ 2.0 Existing ATS

At the present time, the majority of the Alternative Transportation Systems (ATS) in operation in the National Heritage Area are the public transportation services that one would expect to find in a small metropolitan area such as Wheeling. Local fixed-route/fixed-schedule bus service is provided by the Ohio Valley Regional Transportation Authority (OVRTA), which operates a fleet of 16 medium size transit buses and two demand responsive paratransit vehicles. There are also several small, privately owned

taxicab companies in the area. Several intercity tour bus operations are also found in the area.

A reproduction riverboat, the Valley Voyager, is based in Wheeling, and currently offers excursions north and south along the Ohio River.

A private entrepreneur has recently initiated a jitney tour service in the Heritage Area. This operation, Wheeling Jitney Tours, began service in August 1999 with a fleet of three, 13-passenger, gasoline-powered vehicles that previously operated in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The drivers of these vehicles are trained tour guides, who provide narration and interpretative services as the vehicles traverse their routes.

This service is currently being operated only on Saturdays and Sundays. Ridership increased from 12 passengers on the first two days of operation in August (an average of six passengers per day) to 85 passengers on eight service days in November (an average of almost 11 passengers per day). While the first few months of operation were operated without charging a fare, the operator has recently begun charging a fare of \$10 per person for a 1.5-hour narrated tour. During the first two days of requiring a fare over the Thanksgiving holiday weekend, ridership totaled 35 passengers, an average of about 18 persons per day.

The three, 13-passenger vehicles were acquired at a cost of \$12,000 each. The operator estimates that annual operating expenses are approximately \$1,000 per month, exclusive of insurance. Annual insurance for the three vehicles was reported to be approximately \$5,000. The operator is seeking financial support for several public agencies and private businesses in the area to allow for full coverage of operating costs at a lower passenger fare.

■ 3.0 ATS Needs

The Wheeling National Heritage Area Plan outlines a number of transportation improvements designed to support and enhance the overall community revitalization and preservation activities. As described in the Wheeling National Heritage Area Plan document, the recommended transportation elements include the following:

- Generalized transportation linkages;
- Traffic access and circulation;
- Parking for private vehicles and tour and charter buses;
- An Intermodal Transportation Center;
- Circulator minibus services; and
- Water taxi/shuttle services.

Since the completion of the Plan in 1992, several of these transportation improvements have already been implemented. The major project completed to date is the Intermodal

Transportation Center. This is an 850-space parking garage that also includes both local and intercity bus terminal facilities and a visitor information center.

Implementation planning is currently underway for the majority of the other transportation system proposals.

■ 4.0 Basis of ATS Need

The primary basis for the identified ATS needs is the rationale contained in the Heritage Area Plan document. This analysis has been accepted at the federal, state, and local levels as the basic framework for the implementation of the Heritage Area.

Evidence of increasing tourism activity in the area over the past few years in response to expanded marketing and public information campaigns would appear to indicate a potential for the long-term success of this National Heritage Area and the need for continued support of the recommended transportation elements.

■ 5.0 Bibliography

Plan for the Wheeling National Heritage Area; Prepared for the Wheeling National Heritage Area Task Force by Lane, Frenchman and Associates, Inc.; August 1992.

Community Venue Plans for the Wheeling National Heritage Area; Prepared for the Wheeling National Heritage Area Task Force by Lane, Frenchman and Associates, Inc.; July 1994.

■ 6.0 Persons Interviewed

Suzanne Quinn, Executive Director, Wheeling National Heritage Area Corporation

Heidi Forest, Consultant to the Wheeling National Heritage Area Corporation

Franz Van Fuerer, Owner, Wheeling Jitney Tours